

March 7, 1964

Mont 1-06.4 US

Pers: Mollenhoff, Clark

See 4-01.4 US (USIA)

See 4-01.3 US (VOA)

USIA Under Fire

America's chief propaganda arm, the United States Information Agency, may soon come under an intensive Senate investigation. Prompting talk of a probe has been a series of agency actions considered highly detrimental to America's image abroad.

The major item currently arousing lawmakers' wrath is a 30-minute USIA film of last August's "civil rights" demonstration in the Nation's Capital, the March on Washington. Sen. Bourke B. Hickenlooper (R-Iowa) claims the film will leave the impression with foreign observers that the Negro is only a few degrees removed from slavery.

The USIA's Presidentially-appointed Advisory Commission has unanimously requested the agency to stop distribution. Clark Mollenhoff, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for Cowles publications, has written a memorandum to the President sharply critical of the film.

Nevertheless, recently retired USIA chieftain Edward R. Murrow insisted it be distributed throughout the world, including Africa, claiming it is the "best propaganda film ever made." Newly confirmed USIA Director Carl T. Rowan endorsed it earlier this month on the TV-radio program "Issues and Answers."

"Through thirty minutes of film clips," says one reporter shown the film, "the viewer is suffocated with chants of 200,000 Negroes and whites crying for 'freedom, freedom' and shouting demands that Negroes be entitled to earn a decent living." Major attention, he points out, is devoted to Martin Luther King's highly inflammatory rhetoric which protests "unspeakable horrors" visited upon the Negro and the "vicious haters" in Alabama and Mississippi.

"There is not a paragraph, sentence or syllable," notes this reporter, "which balances the awful picture of the American Negro presented by King. There is no mention of Negro millionaires or judges or the obvious progress he has made since slavery."

The USIA narrator, in fact, compounds the theme that the American Negro's lot is not a happy one.

"By the end of August 1963," says the USIA narrator, "in some places of the United States, a Negro could not go to school where he chose, eat where he wished, build his home where it pleased him or find jobs for which he was qualified. He had been insulted, beaten, jailed, drenched with water, chased by dogs..."

Such is the film now being distributed to "build America's image" abroad.

• In addition to this film, a number of senators are deeply disturbed over USIA's chief unit, the Voice of America. After looking into VOA broadcasts, some lawmakers believe the Voice waged "psychological warfare" against the anti-Communist government in Viet Nam last year, thus decisively contributing to the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem. The VOA is also coming in for criticism because of the recent removal of Alexander Barmine, as head of its Russian desk. Barmine, a former Russian general, is considered a tough anti-Communist who has long chafed under VOA's soft-on-Soviet policy.